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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

SAINT JOHN,

BEFORE THE SAINT JOHN'S AND UNION LODGES OF
FREE AND ACCEPTED ANCIENT MASONS.

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST Saint John

1819; RA/252/Bur.....

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By GEORGE BURNS, D. D.

CLERGYMAN OF THE NATIONAL ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF SCOTLAND,
AND MINISTER OF ST. ANDREW'S IN THE CITY OF
SAINT JOHN, NEW-BRUNSWICK.

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1820.

THE SERMON

BY GEDNEY

To the Masters, Wardens, and Brethren of the St. John's, and Union Lodges, held in the City of Saint John,

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This Sermon

Preached before them and Published at their request, is respectfully inscribed by

The Author.

W. GEDNEY

1811

A S E R M O N.

2 PETER I. 5, 7.—“ Giving all diligence, add to—Godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

THE wisdom of God is conspicuously displayed, in the adaptation of our moral powers and capacities, to the relations which we are called to sustain. In the moral constitution of man, a foundation is laid for all the diversified duties and enjoyments which the social union necessarily involves. Were he destined to be a solitary animal, shunning by instinctive influence the haunts of his fellow creatures, and brooding over his own sorrows, without a friend to alleviate their pressure, we might expect that his original constitution would accord with his actual destiny. But “ man was born in society, and there he remains.”* In whatever degrees of civilization human beings are found to exist, they are ever observed to associate. An invisible, but powerful link, connects mind with mind, and man with man. Indeed, it is as obvious as any thing of the kind can be, that had not this been the case in every age and country, the species must long ago have ceased to exist. Viewing, then, the fact as it is, that man does actually exist in a social state—it is interesting and pleasing to mark the wise arrangement which has accommodated his native capacities to his actual condition. Whence the parental and filial affections which expand the soul with an ardour and energy inextinguishable? Whence the high emotions of delight with which

* Montesqieu.

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the eye lingers on the countenance of a relative or friend whom absence has endeared to us? Whence the pleasing sensations with which the interchange of kind attentions dilates the domestic circle? "Sadness and melancholy are connected with solitude; gladness and pleasure with the concourse of men. The track of a Laplander on the snowy shore, gives joy to the lonely mariner; and the mute signs of cordiality and kindness which are made to him, awaken the memory of pleasures which he felt in society."* All these sentiments and feelings may be traced to an original capacity for the relations in which we are actually placed. In this connection also, we may take into view the foundation which has been laid by our beneficent Creator for some of the purest gratifications which can enter the human breast; I mean, the pleasures which result from the active charities of life.

The author of Revelation has with admirable skill accommodated his injunctions to the place which man occupies on the surface of the globe. There is, perhaps, no class of duties more frequently or more earnestly inculcated than those which spring from our social relations. It is not by any means my design to insinuate that the interesting and sublime attitude which man assumes as the creature of God and the heir of immortality, is overlooked. On the contrary, the relations in which we stand immediately to God, and the obligations thence arising, are made the foundation of all relative duties. They are never kept out of view in the system of Christian morals, and their influence is felt more or less throughout the whole detail of scriptural instruction. Love to God is elevated to the rank of a first principle in the Christian character, and that morality is denounced hollow-hearted and superficial, which rests not on the stable basis of Christian truth. But while our higher and nobler relations are thus unequivocally and habitually recognised, it is a certain fact that the duties involved in the social connections of man, hold a most conspicuous place in the great scheme of

Christian

* Dr. Adam Ferguson.

Christian morals. Hence the frequency and earnestness with which our Saviour inculcates on his disciples the obligation of mutual affection and brotherly kindness. Hence the exalted terms in which the duty of almsgiving is uniformly described. Hence the ennobling pre-eminence allotted to those who have consecrated their talents to the purposes of beneficence, and who by their efforts have contributed to augment the sum of human happiness. Hence also, the impressive admonition of the Apostle in my text, " Giving all diligence, add to your—godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity." Before proceeding to recommend and enforce this admonition, I may simply observe that the " godliness" which is mentioned by the Apostle, consists of all those holy affections and dispositions which constitute the spiritual worshipper and truly devoted servant of God—that the " brotherly kindness" which he enjoins as the genuine effect of sound religious principle is an unfeigned fervent love of Christians, as brethren in the **LORD**—and that the "charity" which he recommends in addition to both, is not that sentimental species which is expended in mere wishes and feelings, or in occasional donations to the poor, but that active kind which seeks out its appropriate objects ; which takes a close and accurate inspection of human life as it is ; which devises schemes for doing good ; which accounts no sacrifices too great, and no exertions too severe, in the prosecution of its godlike operations.

I propose to recommend and enforce the practical exercise of brotherly kindness and charity, by viewing its influence on our *benevolent affections*—our *views of human nature*—our *estimate of the truth and value of real religion*—and our *individual happiness*.

1. The exercise of brotherly kindness and charity regulates and strengthens the benevolent affections.—Amid the ruins of the fall, it is pleasing to trace some remaining vestiges of our former grandeur. Alienated as man is from God in the temper of his mind, and in his habitual conduct, he is not altogether insensible to the claims of social

social attachment and reciprocal affection. Strong as is the influence of selfishness in regulating human action, there can hardly be a doubt that benevolence in the common acceptation of the term, is characteristic of human nature.

But in the hands of such a creature as man, the most amiable natural qualities are extremely liable to be corrupted or restrained in their exercise. This is peculiarly the case with our benevolent affections. Mistaking the mere animal emotion of good nature for the ennobling principle of brotherly kindness ; ignorant of the world or viewing it through a distorted medium ; permitting the more generous qualities of our minds to be perverted by the influence of selfishness or ambition—it is not unusual to find the benevolent affections contracted within the dimensions of a sentimental feeling, uninteresting in itself and inefficient in its operation. Many there are, who by an instinctive feeling which they cannot repress, weep at the tale of woe—who heave the commiserating sigh at fictitious representations of distress—and whose souls expand with joy when they hear of the prosperity of their brethren : but with these emotions and these expressions of emotion, their brotherly kindness and charity completely evaporate. Their benevolence is rather a feeling than a principle—a feeling to be cherished as a source of pleasure, rather than as an operative principle leading to active exertions for the general good. This speculative benevolence as we may term it, is extremely capricious in its modes of operation. It is excited not so much by scenes of real distress exhibited to its view, as by the descriptions of such scenes pictured to the imagination. It shrinks from the haunts of squalid wretchedness—the cold, gloomy cell—the bed of straw. It is not regulated by sound judgment, nor controled by the agency of right religious principle.

In order to prevent one of the noblest affections of our nature from thus degenerating into a mere animal emotion, habits of brotherly kindness and charity may be safely

safely recommended. Instead of viewing the principle of benevolence as a merely sentimental feeling to be cherished, by abstract reflection, and inflamed by fanciful representations of human nature, let it be brought forth into public life; let it come into contact with things as they are; and let its influence be exerted to relieve actual misery. Seeking for its objects with impartiality and care; weighing with nice discrimination opposite or interfering claims; marking with accuracy the endless diversities of aspect which the human character and condition assume; proportioning its effects to its means, and guarding against the danger of allowing the feelings of the moment to gain the ascendency over the solid decisions of the judgment—the emotion of benevolence will be transformed into a rational, regular, and habitually operative principle. It will no longer be liable to counteraction from the state of the animal spirits, nor will it vary with the varying humours of the mind. At the same time, however, it ought not to be forgotten that the beneficence which produces these effects must itself be regulated by principle. A connection must be established between the natural feelings, of the human mind and the powerfully constraining influence of moral and religious truth. To godliness must be added brotherly kindness and charity. Native benevolence must be ingrafted on the root of Christian principle. In this way it will be refined and purified and regulated. Thus will love to God and man be exhibited in their just connections, and thus will we imitate him “who went about doing good.”

II. Habits of brotherly kindness and charity enable us to form just views of human nature.—There are few subjects concerning which more erroneous sentiments are entertained than the moral state and character of man. For this, it is by no means difficult to account. The mind, it has been observed, like the eye, while it sees every other object, cannot see itself. Men are so completely occupied with external concerns, matters in which interest and ambition find gratification, that they overlook themselves and

and the moral qualities of which their nature partakes. Besides, the feeling of pride and self complacence so deeply rooted in the heart, and extending its influence over the whole of the moral frame, leads us to form high conceptions of ourselves, and to overlook the defects which unquestionably adhere to us. Even the principle of benevolence, amiable and excellent as it is, has a tendency to mislead us in our estimates of human nature. Wishing well to the human race, the transition to thinking well of it, is natural and easy. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that man is such a weak, depraved, and wretched creature as he is sometimes represented. We discover, or think we discover in him certain amiable qualities, these we easily confound with moral excellencies, and thus form to ourselves a picture pleasing and fascinating to the imagination. The error is increased by the habit of viewing the world through the deceitful medium of our own prepossessions, or in the pictures which fancy has constructed for our use. Such erroneous views of human nature, while they afford a momentary pleasure to the mind, are eventually productive of the most baneful effects. They tend to keep us in profound ignorance of our own hearts, and consequently prevent us from seeing and feeling our own wants, or from seeking to have them supplied. They nourish the seeds of pride and vain glory, and other dispositions far remote from the genuine spirit of true religion.

Habits of brotherly kindness and charity are peculiarly well fitted to correct our views of human nature. In the retirement of solitude, contemplating human life and its affairs at a distance, and influenced by our own private wishes and feelings, we form to ourselves the idea of a being naturally pure in his affections, elevated in his views, and enjoying all the felicity of which he is capable. But let us come forth into the world and contemplate the aspect which it actually exhibits. Let us enter the cell of the prisoner, and the cottage of the poor. Let us approach the couch of sickness and of death. With the heaven

heaven-born feelings of benevolence let us sympathise with the solitary mourner, lay ourselves open to the influence of those thousand ills which wring the soul to anguish, and listen to the heart-rending cry of penury and wretchedness. Advancing in the career of beneficence, scenes will present themselves to the compassionate eye which in opposition to our former prepossessions can hardly fail to sober our conceptions of things. Poverty and distress seen through the veil of a moral painting may be invested even with charms. But survey them in actual life and a very different impression is produced. What a variety of shades does the principle of corruption in man assume ! What a mass of misery does human life present to our view ! The obvious tendency of such practical surveys of human life is to check the emotions of pride, and to cherish the principle of humility in the widest sense of the term.

Habits of brotherly kindness and charity have also a tendency to enlarge our knowledge of human nature inasmuch as they lead us to observe man in a variety of situations ; to mark the diversities of the human character, the influence which external condition has on the heart, and the impression which deeds of beneficence make on different minds. The discoveries thus made may be practically applied to the improvement of our own hearts. They may be instrumental in weakening our attachment to present objects, in elevating our minds to those which are spiritual and divine, and in leading forward our views to that state where evil both natural and moral shall be for ever unknown.

III. The exercise of brotherly kindness and charity furnishes a practical evidence of the truth and value of real religion.—In every age of the Church, much evil has resulted from the tendency which men uniformly discover to form too speculative and abstract views of religious truth. That religion, like every other subject of intellectual inquiry, admits of systematic arrangement, and may be presented to the mind in its just relations, is unquestionable.

onable. But in forming our views of religion, there is a danger of no trifling magnitude against which it becomes us to be specially on our guard. While the great majority of human pursuits have little connection with the heart of man or his conduct in life, it is the professed and leading design of religion to control the will and regulate the conduct. Now, speculations on the theory or abstract system of religion, have a natural tendency to induce a forgetfulness of this great fact, and to make us lose sight of the grand concern which each of us has, in the sublime realities of religion. We view the interesting doctrines of christianity merely as parts of a theological system, and attend not to the practical results which they are intended to produce in actual life.

Habits of beneficence while they enable us to form proper conceptions of the actual character and state of man, enable us also to see the admirable adaptation of the Gospel to his natural condition. Long did philosophy brood over the miseries of her children, and long did she amuse herself in devising schemes for their relief. In the religion of Jesus we find what all "the wisdom of the world" could never disclose,—a remedy for all the diseases of our nature, a balm for the bleeding heart, a substitute for the want of human comforts, a pillow for the bed of death. Its treasures enrich the cottage of the poor. Its vivifying energy communicates new life to the decrepitude of age. Its consolations support the fainting spirit when surrounding objects can no longer charm. Its hopes irradiate the vale of death.

The solitary inquirer may form just, and accurate, and scriptural views of religion. He may trace with correctness its leading features, and mark its discriminate excellencies. He may compare it with what he knows of the actual condition of man, and descry the traces of divine wisdom which it displays. But it is the man of active benevolence alone who brings it to the test of experiment, who sees it in actual use, and witnesses its practical application. He discovers the influence of real religion elevating

ting the mind to a sublime spirituality, communicating the most enlarged views of the divine character and Providence, giving strength to support amid the most distressing vicissitudes, and calm the breast which throbs with the anguish of guilt. Religion in fact operates a most beneficial change even on the *intellectual* condition of man. It strengthens his faculties. It enlarges his conceptions. It gives him clear ideas on the most sublime subjects which can engage the mind of man. It supplies the want of outward comforts, while it expands the soul with anticipations of future bliss. Even to the most wretched of our species, it points to a source of joy ever accessible. It furnishes objects on which the mind may dwell with satisfaction. It dispels the gloom which encompasses surrounding objects, and leads forward to that world of light, where "we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known." It is in its application to such exigencies that the superior excellence of religion is best perceived. We know independently of experiment and fact, that religion is the most excellent thing and a source of the purest joy, but in the case of its alleviating actual suffering, we see that it is so. An argument is furnished which comes home to every mind, and operates with a force which we may resist, but cannot overcome. The triumphs of divine grace are displayed and Christianity is found to be indeed the friend of man.

IV. The exercise of brotherly kindness and charity is highly conducive to the happiness of man.—When we "rejoice with those who rejoice," we participate in their felicity; nay, when we visit the house of mourning, to "weep with those who weep," to soften the pillow on which the hoary head of age reclines, and to cause "the widow's heart to sing for joy," we cherish a tender pleasure, and share in those consolations which we impart to others. Benevolence, indeed, is so agreeable to the common notions of mankind, that every one condemns the mean and sordid spirit of that wretch whom God has blest with abundance and consequently with the means of blessing

sing others, who is yet relentless to the cries of the destitute; who is ever amassing riches, but never bestowing them; whose soul the good of himself entirely engrosses. True benevolence, extensive as the light of the sun, takes in all mankind. It is not indeed in your power to support all the indigent, incurable and aged, or to train up in the paths of virtue many fatherless children, but if from a principle of true godliness, you cherish each generous and liberal movement of the soul, with a head ever studious to contrive, a heart ever willing to promote, and hands ever ready to distribute to the necessities of others, the deeds of charity which you were denied the means of performing shall be placed to your account. To grasp thus the whole system of reasonable beings with an overflowing love, is to possess the greatest of all earthly enjoyments, to make approaches to the happiness of higher natures, and to anticipate the joys of the future world. "Blessed is he who considereth the case of the poor." "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." The riches which from christian principles we give away, shall abide with us forever. The same habit of love shall accompany us into the world of spirits. The bud which hath opened here, will blow into full expansion above, and beautify the paradise in the Heavens.

In addressing myself to you who are associated together professedly for useful and benevolent purposes, who carry about with you the Bible as the standard to which you appeal and as the source from which you derive your principles of action, who, in fact, openly declare yourselves to be guided by the purest feelings of brotherly kindness and charity, I need not employ many arguments to recommend and enforce the admonition of the text. I feel and acknowledge my inability to do justice to the subject in reference to the occasion on which we are now assembled, from my inadequate information regarding the real principles of the Masonic Order. I have some slight acquaintance with its origin, progress, and present state, in as far as these have come into public view. I am aware that it boasts

boasts of the highest antiquity, that it can rank among the number of its votaries some of the greatest and best of men, and that its rules and regulations are wise and good. Adopting the language of one of the Fraternity, I can say with reference to one leading object for which we are now convened that "the Mason is engaged by bonds to works of beneficence. What others might do from sentiment or neglect to do from the want of it, he will certainly perform both from sentiment and principle. All his acts are justice; all his feelings mercy. His religion is the worship of God; his politicks devotion to his country. He cultivates the moral and social duties, and among these Charity is pre-eminent. Charity is the Arch which, expansive as the Heavens, composes the canopy of our Temple, and which rests on the two main pillars which are *established in strength*. The Key-stone of this Arch is brotherly love, which binds the parts together, and confirms their solidity. Love and Charity are the heart and soul of Masonry. They prompt to feeling and to action. It is their province to govern our conduct, and it is our duty to submit to their control; for they are the brightest daughters of Heaven."* All that remains for me then, Brethren, is to call you to the exercise of those very principles which bind you together, and to the immediate display of those feelings by which you profess ever to be actuated. Extend your sympathy beyond the limits of your own craft. Regard the whole world as one Lodge—view the human race as one family—behold in every fellow creature a Brother—and let your benevolence be as wide in its range as the universe of God. Compassion is the call of our Father in Heaven to us his children exciting us to relieve the distresses of our brethren. This is an affection wisely interwoven in our frame, that whereas abstracted reason is too sedentary and remiss a counsellor, we might have a more instant and vigorous pleader, urging us on to deeds of charity and "labours of love." As far, indeed, as it is ingrafted, it is mere instinct; but when we cultivate and cherish

* Masonic Oration by George H. Richards, Esq.

cherish it till we love mercy, when we dwell on every tender sentiment that opens the mind and enlarges the heart, then it becomes a virtue. Too many are ready to excuse themselves and to say that their circumstances are but just easy to answer the demands of their family, and that, upon the great and the opulent, the whole burden of relieving the indigent ought to fall. But do these men indulge themselves in no expences unsuitable to their rank and condition? Imaginary wants are boundless, and Charity will never begin if we wait till these have an end. Every man, whether rich or poor, is concerned in this subject, and he who has little is as much bound to give something out of that little, as he who has more is obliged to give more. When the poor widow threw her one mite into the treasury she exercised a nobler charity than all the rich had done. The smallest gift may be the greatest bounty. Put thyself then in the room of some poor unfriended wretch, beset perhaps with a large family, broken by misfortune, and pining in poverty, while silent grief preys upon his vitals; in such a case what wouldst thou think it reasonable that thy neighbour should do? That, like the Priest and the Levite, he should look on with an eye of indifference, and pass by on the other side; or like the good Samaritan, should pour balm into thy wounded mind? Be thyself the judge! and whatsoever thou thinkest it reasonable that thy neighbour should do unto thee, "go thou, and do likewise."

Throughout the whole of this discourse I have considered brotherly kindness and charity in the most enlarged sense of the terms, without regard to the particular modes in which they display themselves in life. It is certain that the objects of beneficence are diversified in their nature and degrees of importance. I have no hesitation in assigning the primary place in the scale to that active charity which has for its object the relief of moral and spiritual distresses, and which aims to accomplish its object by enlarging the means of religious instruction for the poor, by disseminating the word of life, and by affording the means

of religious knowledge to those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. It thus removes evil by anticipating its approach and preventing its existence.—The next place in the scale I would assign to that active benevolence which with ingenuity and care applies itself to the supply of natural defects, restores and renders useful to society those who if unnoticed would either perish for want, or become burdens on their brethren, and communicates to the helpless the pleasures of independence and the comforts of industrious exertion. The value of this beneficence is much enhanced when it comprehends within the sphere of its exertions the understanding and the heart of man ; when it combines its energies for supplying bodily defects with corresponding energies for improving the understanding and purifying the heart. It thus resembles the beneficence of JEHOVAH himself, who, while he delivers us from dangers and “crowneth us with loving kindness and tender mercy,” rescueth our souls from destruction, and saves his people with an everlasting salvation. To those who are traversing this path of beneficence, I would earnestly say, God speed ! They are workmen together with God, and their record is with him. To the liberal praise of every true philanthropist they are most justly entitled. Should it so happen that, amid the unaccountable vicissitudes of present things, or through the malice of men, this meed should not be awarded them, nevertheless they shall not lose their recompence. Acting from the pure spirit and principles of the Gospel ; adding brotherly kindness and charity to true godliness in the heart ; inflamed by love to the SAVIOUR, and displaying that love by active efforts in behalf of their neighbours—the testimony of a good conscience shall be theirs.—God will not be unmindful of their “work of faith and labour of love.” Their deeds shall be enrolled in the archives of Heaven, and their names shall be held “in everlasting remembrance.”